Colonel William Craig

Mountain Man and First Permanent Settler in Idaho

By D. B. Kraybill

In the late summer of 1954, I made a survey of the school district of Sandpoint, Idaho in connection with my duties as a Field Representative of the Office of Education. I was eager to get to know the history of the five Mountain States of Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming and Colorado, which constituted the territory I was serving. The business manager of Sandpoint School District gave me a copy of the *History of the State of Idaho*[1] which was used in the schools and in this book I found the following brief statement about Colonel William Craig:

> Idaho's first permanent white settler was Colonel William Craig. Born in Greenbrier County, Virginia, in 1807, he cast his lot with the Rocky Mountain trappers in the summer of 1829. During the romantic fur-trading third decade of the last century, he, with his intimate associates, Robert Newell and Joseph Meek, led the wild, free life of the fur hunter. Shortly after the arrival of the Reverend H. H. Spalding at Lapwai (1836) Colonel Craig selected a home near the mission on Lapwai Creek. The records show that he established a permanent residence in Idaho in the fall of 1846. In harmony with the provisions of the Oregon Donation Act of 1850, he and his Nez Perce wife, Isabel, claimed and patented 640 acres of land at Lapwai. During the winter of 1855-1856 he rendered distinguished aid to Governor I. I. Stevens while the latter was negotiating a series of Indian treaties. So conspicuous was his leadership among the Nez Perce's that he was given a place on Governor Steven's staff with the title of Lieutenant-Colonel.
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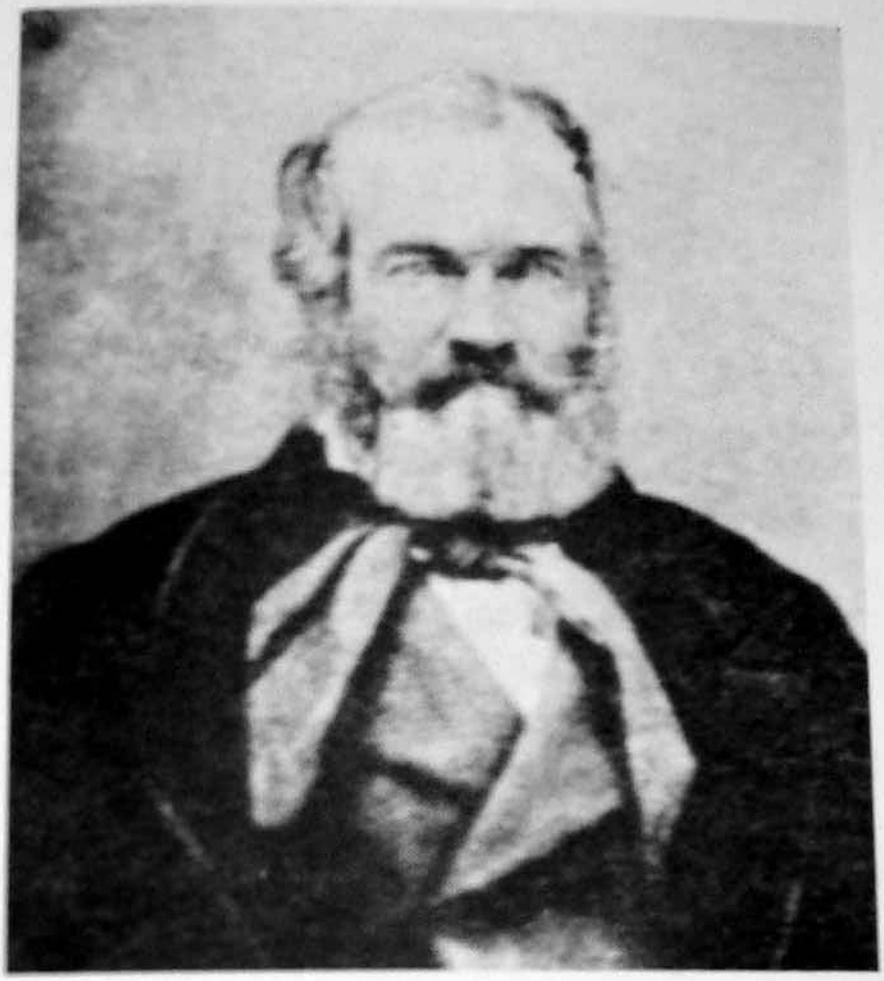
> During the winter of 1858-1859 he was postmaster at Walla Walla, where he resided temporarily. He was the first Indian Agent at Lapwai and was influential politically during the early years of the Territory. He died in 1869 and was buried at Lapwai.

Contact with the historians of the Far West educational institutions and research into the literature of the fur trading era in the Far West, including many biographies of Mountain Men or Free Trappers, has led to the following findings: (1) Little is known of Colonel Craig's early life. At age 17, he is reputed to have killed a neighbor in self defense and then

[1] C. J. Brosnan, *History of the State of Idaho*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948, p. 111.



COLONEL WILLIAM CRAIG

(Courtesy of Nellie B. Pipes, Oregon Historical Society). A reprint from *The Colorado Magazine* (Sept. 1934), publication of the State Historical Society of Colorado.

fled to the west. He would never speak of his life in Greenbrier County Virginia, now West Virginia. (2) From the biographies of some of the Mountain Men such as Kit Carson, Robert Newell, Joseph Meek, Jim Bridger, Old Bill Williams and others, we hear of him repeatedly and know that he was on many hunting and trapping expeditions during the hey-day of the trappers—from the middle twenties to the early forties. He was with Joe Walker who was assigned, by Captain Bonneville, to lead an expedition to explore Great Salt Lake. (3) Craig, together with Thompson and Sinclair, owned Fort Davy Crockett,[2] built in Brown's Hole in northwestern Colorado. It was located on the left bank of the Green River, above the mouth of Vermillion Creek. (4) Colonel Craig was a respected and influential citizen in the early days of Idaho Territory. Craig Mountain in Idaho is named after him. There is a Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution in Lewiston, Idaho, known as William Craig Chapter Number 2. This chapter took upon itself the task of securing funds to erect a suitable marker at the grave of Craig. His resting place is at Jaques Spur, near the mouth of Mission Creek, Idaho. The grave is in plain sight of the North and South Highway.

Craig's Early Life

References to the year of birth of Craig vary from the years 1800 to 1807. All references to his place of birth give Greenbrier County, Virginia. Nicholas County, West Virginia was formed January 29, 1818, by act of the General Assembly of Virginia, mainly from Kanawha County but included a small area from Greenbrier and Randolph Counties. The establishment of Fayette County (1831), Braxton County (1836), Clay County (1858), and Webster County (1860), successively altered the boundary of Nicholas County.[3] Descendants of William Craig, a Covenanter, from Ulster, Ireland who first moved to Pennsylvania (1721) and later to Augusta County, Virginia, settled finally in Greenbrier County, Virginia (now West Virginia) above Spring Creek. Robert Craig, of this family, came to Nicholas County in 1837 and located on what is now the Fielding Herold farm.[4]

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[2] Leroy R. Hafen, "Fort Davy Crockett, Its Fur Men and Visitors", *Colorado Magazine*, January, 1951, p. 7ff.

[3] William Griffee Brown, *History of Nicholas County*, (1954), pp. 1, 2, 3.

[4] Ibid., p. 38.

Whether our subject, William Craig, was of a family that had moved to Nicholas County or of a family remaining in Greenbrier County, further researches will have to determine. It is likely that he actually grew up in what is now Greenbrier County, West Virginia. If we take 1807 as his year of birth and age 17 or 18 (both ages are found recorded) as his age when leaving for the west, he would have left about the year 1825. This was 12 years prior to the first Craig coming to Nicholas County.

We here submit two brief accounts of his early life that vary only slightly in dates and the nature of his earliest activity in the west. Robert G. Bailey gives the following account:

> The authenticated story of Colonel Craig begins with his appearance in St. Louis in 1818. St. Louis at that time was the headquarters of the American fur traders, who were seeking to oust the Hudson Bay trappers of the Northwest. Craig joined one of the outfits, composed of American traders, or French Canadians, as they were popularly known, and accompanied them in bateaus [sic] to what is now Fort Benton, Missouri. Here he left his trader friends and joined forces with a number of trappers, who were headed for the Rocky Mountains. In time he became a full fledged trapper. The main rendezvous for the trappers was at Fort Bridger, Wyoming. It was here that Craig first met the Nez Perces, who told him of the large quantities of fur to be had in what is now Central Idaho. Later, Craig, Meek, and Robert Newell accompanied a party of Nez Perce Indians to their home section where they engaged in trapping on the waters of the Clearwater and Salmon. The date of this expedition is given as of 1829. On this trip each of the trappers got himself a Nez Perce wife, and with them returned to their rendezvous east of the Rocky Mountains. Craig had an adventurous career and for ten years after his marriage roamed the western country from Wyoming to the Pacific Ocean. He was a member of the Walker expedition to California (1833-1834).[5]

In the *Colorado Magazine*, September, 1934, Leroy R. Hafen gives us the following account:

> Of William Craig's early life we know but little. He was born in Greenbrier County of the 'Old Dominion', as he called his native state (Virginia), about 1799 or 1800. At the age of 18 he quarreled with a man much older than himself and killed him in self defense. Alarmed at this act, he went to St. Louis; here in this emporium of the fur trade, he joined a party of

[5] Robert G. Bailey, *River of No Return*, (1947) p. 41.

> French Canadian trappers bound for the upper Missouri. With bateaus [sic] they made the long, arduous journey to the vicinity of the present Fort Benton, then moved south into the mountains. Craig left the Canadians, joined American trappers and became a full fledged Mountain Man.[6]

So far, we have found no clear references to Craig, as a trapper, until 1829 when he joined the expedition under Smith, Jackson, and Sublette. The party of 54 trappers recruited by William Sublette left St. Louis March 17, 1829 and headed for the Rocky Mountains. It may well be that up to that time he was with the trappers operating in the upper Missouri. General William H. Ashley spearheaded the trading and trapping expeditions in that area from 1822 to 1826 when he sold out to Smith, Jackson, and Sublette.

Craig as Free Trapper and Mountain Man

It should be remembered that prior to the hey-day of the Mountain Men or Free Trappers, the southwestern part of what is now United States and most of what we speak of as Rocky Mountain Area, was Spanish Territory. There was not yet a settlement of boundary line in the disputed Oregon Country. In 1821 the Independent Republic of Mexico was established. In 1822 Mexico reversed the traditional Spanish policy and threw open the doors of New Mexico to American trade. In 1825 the state of Coahuila-Texas, of which Texas was a district, adopted a land law which opened the state to all Christians of good moral and personal habits who would swear allegiance to Mexico. Little wonder, then, that the decade beginning about 1820 saw enterprising and venturesome souls, from the East, beginning a trek to the West to open up trade. This, too, was the day of the Beaver Hat. The stage was set for the Western Trader and Trapper. The outpost of Toas, New Mexico, was the jumping-off point for trappers operating in the southwest. St. Louis was the starting point for those heading for the Northern Rockies and the Upper Missouri.

There was ushered into existence a new breed of men: The "free trappers" or "mountain men" as they called themselves. These individuals are aptly described by Enid Johnson in his biography of Bill Williams:

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[6] Leroy R. Hafen, "Mountain Men: William Craig", The Colorado Magazine, September, 1958, Vol. XL, No. 3, p. 171.

> The true pathfinders of the West were the Mountain Men; they were the hardy adventurers who wandered over the unknown deserts and mountains of the West in their search for beaver and to trade with the Indians. So they were called 'Mountain Men'.
>
> From the early 1800's to 1850 they roamed far and wide over the West adventuring into its lonely places, discovering its hidden trails, marching with the sun to the last frontier. Each footstep beset with danger from wild beasts, hostile Indians, hunger, cold, thirst, and many accidents.
>
> It was they who first explored and established the routes to travel which are now and ever will be the avenues of commerce in that region.
>
> The moving force in their lives was an intense love for the freedom of the wilderness. The mountain man knew that he would have to walk alone, relying upon himself, working and fighting on his own hook.[7]

William Craig was identified with these Mountain Men at least from 1829 to 1840 when he settled near Lapwai, Idaho with his Nez Perce Indian wife, Isabel.

In her biography of Joe Meek, Mrs. F. F. Victor sets forth the following incidents involving Craig:

> In the fall of 1829, while employed in William Sublette's trapper band, Craig became acquainted with a fellow Virginian, Joseph L. Meek. One day Craig, Meek, and Nelson were traveling up a creek on foot to tend their traps, when they came suddenly upon a red bear. The three men ran for trees. Craig and Meek climbed a large pine, but Nelson took to one of two small trees that grew close together. The bear followed Nelson. With his back against one tree and his feet against the other the bear climbed almost to Nelson's perch. When the trees separated with the bear's weight and he fell to the ground, the bear tried a second time with the same result. With his third fall the beast gave up in disgust and ambled away.
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> 'Then', says Meek, 'Craig began to sing and I began to laugh, but Nelson took to swearing'. 'Oh, yes, you can laugh and sing now', says Nelson, 'but you were quiet enough when the bear was around'. 'Why, Nelson', Meek answered, 'you wouldn't have us noisy before that distinguished guest of yours'. 'But Nelson damned the wild beast and Craig and I laughed and said he didn't seem wild a bit.'[8]

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[7] Reid Johnson, Bill Williams—Julian Messner, Inc., N. Y. Foreword.
[8] F. F. Victor, The River of the West, pp. 71-72.

Meek also tells this story on Craig. An incident that happened in the winter of 1829-1830:

> While the trappers were crossing the mountains between the Yellowstone and Bighorn Rivers, game was scarce and provisions were nearly exhausted. Craig managed to catch a rabbit and put it up to roast before the fire—a tempting looking morsel to starving mountaineers. Some of his associates determined to see how it tasted, and Craig was told that the Booshways (a corruption of the word Bourgeois, the bosses, or leaders of the expedition) wished to speak to him at their lodge. While he obeyed this supposed command, the rabbit was spirited away, never more to be seen by mortal man. When Craig returned to the campfire, and beheld the place vacant where the rabbit was so nicely roasting, his passion knew no bounds, and he declared his intention of cutting it out of the stomach that contained it. But as finding the identical stomach which contained it involved the cutting open of many that probably did not, in the search, he was fain to relinquish that mode of vengeance, together with his hopes of supper.[9]

Captain Benjamin L. E. Bonneville, a West Point graduate, who had become infected with the frontier fever, had secured the financial backing of a wealthy New Yorker and had come west in 1832 with 110 men. His experiences since that time had hardly been of the sort to delight his patron. The elaborately planned Fort Bonneville that he built in the Green River Valley was abandoned almost as soon as completed, while his brigades had been so handicapped by his inexperienced leadership that their catch in furs was small. Still clinging to hopes of a fortune, he ordered one of his bands of mountaineers westward at the close of the 1833 rendezvous, with instructions to search the barren lands beyond Great Salt Lake for likely hunting grounds. This was the expedition that gave its leader, Joseph Reddeford Walker, an opportunity to earn his niche among the pathfinders of the American West.

> No pains or expense were spared in fitting out this party of forty men which he was to command. They had complete supplies for a year, and were to meet Captain Bonneville in the ensuing summer, in the Valley of Bear River, the largest tributary of Salt Lake, which was to be his point of general rendezvous.[10]

[9] F. F. Victor, *The River of the West*, p. 78.
[10] Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U. S. A.*, The Co-operative Publication Society, Inc., (New York and London), p. 160.

A description of this expedition is given in various biographies of men who were among the 40 who made the journey. The accounts vary. According to Joe Meek they passed through what is now Yosemite National Park. We are here setting forth a brief account of the expedition as found in *The Far Western Frontier* by Ray Allen Billington:

> Walker's men skirted the north shore of the Great Salt Lake, found their way through the wild land of rocks and sand that lay beyond, followed the well-trapped Humboldt River to the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and crossed this awesome barrier where swirling snow and icy winds reduced even the seasoned hunters to near desparation, [sic] to emerge at last amidst the warmth of the San Juaquin Valley of California. Pushing on to San Francisco, the party turned southward along the coast to Monterey, where they spent the winter of 1833-34. In mid-February Walker took the trail once more, moving south along the San Juaquin Valley to Kern River, which was followed eastward into the low defile since known as Walker Pass. There the hunters turned to skirt the Sierras as they marched through Owens Valley and across parched deserts where they nearly died of thirst. In June they picked up their own trail which led them back along the Humboldt in time to reach the 1834 rendezvous at Ham's Fork of the Green River.[11]

William Craig, with other independent trappers, was among the 40 men who joined the Joe Walker expedition to California. A story pertaining to it which Craig told to Thomas J. Beall after they met in Idaho in 1857 is here repeated:

> The waters of the Humboldt River are of a milky cast, not clear. So one afternoon, while camped on the said stream, and being the first to strip, I started for the swimming hole and was just about to plunge in when I got a hunch that things were not as they should be and I had better investigate before taking a dive. I did so and found the water was about a foot and a half deep and the mud four, this condition being in the eddy. So I waded to where there was a current and found the water a little more than waist deep, no mud and good smooth bottom. In looking toward the camp I espied Joe Walker coming and he was jumping like a buck deer and when he arrived at the brink he says to me: 'How is it?' 'Joe,' I replied, 'It is just splendid.' With that he plunged head first into that four and a half feet of blue mud.
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> Fearing trouble and not being interested in the subsequent proceedings, I made myself scarce by hiding in the brush on

[11] Ray Allen Billington, *The Far Western Frontier 1830-1860*, Harper and Brothers, p. 80.

the opposite side and in so doing I ran into some rosebrier bushes and scratched myself some, but I was so full of laughter I did not mind that. I peeped through the bushes just in time to see him extricate himself from the mud. He then washed the mud off as well as he could, returned to the tepee, put on his clothes, shot his rifle off, cleaned it, then reloaded it and hollered at me, and said: 'Now show yourself and I'll drop a piece of lead into you' which I failed to do, as I did not want to be encumbered with any extra weight, especially at that time. I was compelled to remain in hiding most of the afternoon. Before sundown I was told to come into camp and get my supper and leave, that I could not travel any further with that party.

I was very glad of the permit for it was rather monotonous out there in the brush with nothing but a blanket around me and nobody to talk to and my pipe in camp. I soon dressed myself and then it was time to chew. Our company was divided into messes and each mess was provided with a dressed buffalo hide. It was spread on the ground and the grub placed upon it. When supper was announced we sat down. I sat opposite to Walker and in looking at him discovered some of the blue mud of the Humboldt on each side of his nose and just below his eyelids, and I could not help laughing. He addressed me in an abrupt manner and said: 'What the h--l are you laughing at?' I told him that gentlemen generally washed before eating. With that the others observed the mud and they too roared with laughter in which Walker joined, but he threatened if ever I played another such trick on him he would kill me as sure as my name was Craig. This place on the Humboldt River was ever afterwards called by the mountain men 'Walker's Plunge' or 'Hole'.

Craig characterized the Walker expedition as more of a horse-stealing than a fur-trapping expedition. He says that they got away with 500 to 600 horses, which they traded to the Indians on the way back to the Rocky Mountains.[12]

In his biography of Joe Meek, in Chapter VI, "The Exciting Year of 1832", Harvey E. Tobie has the following reference to Craig:

Late in the fall, Meek, Craig and a few other hunters joined the northern party of which Newell was a member, on an exchange of men. On the Madison River they were again within a few miles of their Tagging American Fur Company rivals. For several days disagreeable weather and mud underfoot kept both groups from moving; but story-telling, card playing and other amusements helped the fraternizing men while away hours that would otherwise have been tedious.

[12] Thomas J. Snell, "Recollections of William Craig", in Lewiston (Idaho) Tribune, March 2, 1918.

> Those ahead had the best hunting, and the Rocky Mountain men broke camp October 11. Three days later, Vanderburgh, moving in the opposite direction, met his death in an Indian attack. Fitzpatrick's men were also subjected to Indian annoyance which Newell noted briefly: 'Met some Blackfeet, 60 warriors, made peace with them and the next day fought another party. Returned to Salmon River and took up winter's quarters.'[13]

Bernard DeVoto in *Across The Wide Missouri* gives a detailed description of the fur trading expedition led by Jim Bridger in 1838. The Bridger brigade met with a group of missionaries on their way to the Oregon Country. Meek, Newell, Joe Walker, and Craig were with the expedition and the paragraph that we here quote shows that Mrs. Craig was with him. The rendezvous was at the Popo Agie not far west of Fort Laramie:

> While their husbands tinkered with the outfit, the ladies (missionaries' wives) moved New England to the Popo Agie by setting up a sewing circle. Humble, frantically inquisitive squaws hung round them in platoons, touching them to see the blood move under this odd white skin, inspecting the mysterious articles in their personal outfit, fingering unheard of things like brooches and hartshorns and pancake turners. The white squaws had odd, but admirable equipment for dressmaking; thimbles, emery bags in the shape of strawberries, needles of many sizes but all small to Indian eyes, darning eggs, embroidery frames, threads of all sizes and colors, yarns, silk flosses. They could do no finer work with these tools than the red ladies did with awls and split sinews but they could work with stupefying ease and speed. So the squaws sighed and chattered and brought the ladies the bright cottons their husbands had been buying for them at the trading booths and the ladies made dresses for them unquestionably longer in the skirts than Indian fashion prescribed. Myra mentions Mrs. Joe Walker and Mrs. Craig; Mary, Mrs. Robinson. Craig was an old Rocky Mountain Fur Company man; there were numerous Robinsons. Others are mentioned in quantity but not named. Myra sniffs at the mean quality of the cloth and is scandalized by its cost of two dollars a yard.'[14]

This reference in DeVoto's book seems to be in harmony with what Francis Haines quotes in his book *The Nez Perces* relative to Craig's wife. But the marriage to Isabel, in 1838, would not be in harmony with the statement by Bailey in his *River of No Return* (Note 5) which has Craig getting himself

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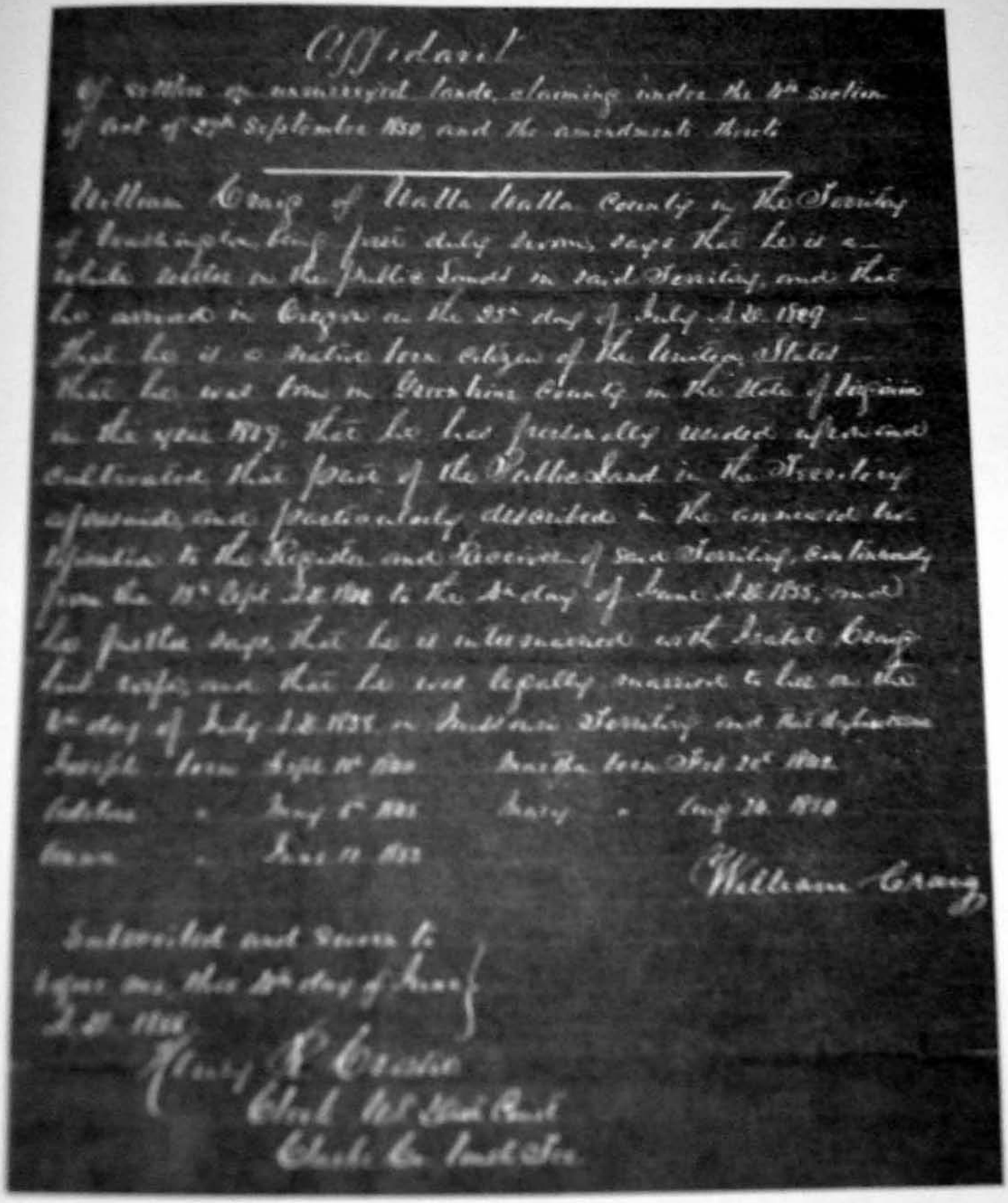
[13] Harvey E. Tobie, *No More Like Joe*, Portland, Oregon, pp. 31, 32.
[14] Bernard DeVoto, *Across The Wide Missouri*, Houghton Mifflin Company, p. 253.



Affidavit

Of settlers on unsurveyed lands, claiming under the 4th Section of Act of 27th September 1850, and the amendments thereto

William Craig of Walla Walla County in the Territory of Washington being first duly sworn says that he is a white settler on the Public Lands in said Territory, and that he arrived in Oregon on the 25th day of July A.D. 1849 — that he is a native born citizen of the United States — that he was born in Greenbrier County in the State of Virginia in the year 1807, that he has previously settled upon and cultivated that part of the Public Land in the Territory aforesaid, and particularly described in the annexed declaration to the Register and Receiver of said Territory, on January from the 17th Sept A.D. 1850 to the 4th day of June A.D. 1855, and he further says that he is interested with Isabel Craig his wife, and that he was legally married to her on the 4th day of July A.D. 1838 in Jackson Territory and that Sylvester born Sept 10th 1839 Martha born Feb 24th 1842.

Isabella " May 6th 1841 Mary " Aug 20 1840

Hiram " June 11 1843

William Craig

Subscribed and Sworn to before me this 4th day of June A.D. 1855

Henry K Crandall
Clerk U.S. District Court
Clerk Co. Probate Court

Note that this affidavit establishes Craig's birthdate as 1807 in Greenbrier County in the State of Virginia.

a wife in 1829. We know that Craig visited the Nez Perce Country in 1829 and, at that time, could have met Isabel, but his affidavit relative to "Settlers on Unassigned Lands" in Washington Territory (National Archives, Washington, D. C.) gives July 6, 1838 as the date of his marriage and September 10, 1840 the date of birth of their first child. The reference by Haines follows:

> In 1838, at the Wyoming rendezvous, Craig married Isabel, daughter of Chief James of Lapwai. Two years later, in the summer of 1840, he helped Robert Newell and Joe Meek take two wagons from Fort Hall to Walla Walla for Marcus Whitman. Soon after that, he and his wife appeared at her father's village on Lapwai Creek, where Craig began farming a tract of bottom land near the Spalding Mission. When Spalding objected, saying that he needed all that land for the mission farm, Craig moved farther up the Creek. In 1846, he secured a government deed to his farm, the first deeded land in Idaho.[15]

Fort Davy Crockett—Its Owners and Visitors

Numerous references to Fort Davy Crockett give Craig, along with Thompson and Sinclair as the owners. Located as it was along the left bank of the Green River in the northwest corner of Colorado, it seems to have been a crossroads place, more or less secluded and visited, at sometime or other, by most of the famous Mountain Men of that era. Since Craig was one of the owners, and, therefore, frequently found there, I felt that a description of the fort, as given by several of its visitors, should be set forth in this study; also a word about the other two owners; and some references to visits involving Craig.

The date of the founding of Fort Davy Crockett has not been definitely determined. Brown's Hole, the mountain-walled valley that was the site of the post, had long been a favorite winter resort for the Indians. In this grassy retreat the Indian bands sought shelter from the storms that swept the surrounding mountains.

The most exhaustive study that has been made of Fort Davy Crockett is the one reported in the January, 1952 issue of the Colorado *Magazine*, published by the State Historical Society of Colorado. This report is by Leroy R. Hafen. He quotes T. J. Farnham as follows:

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[15] Francis Haines, The Nez Perces, University of Oklahoma Press, p. 83.

> Thomas Jefferson Farnham, leader of an Oregon-bound party from Peoria, Illinois, reached the post on August 12, 1839, after some rugged experiences in crossing northwestern Colorado. He writes that the Fort is a hollow square of one story, with roofs and floors of mud, constructed in the same manner as those of Fort Bent on the Arkansas River. Around these we found the conical skin lodges of the squaws of the white trappers, who were away on their "fall hunt", and also the lodges of a few snake Indians, who had preceded their tribes to this, their winter haunt. Here also were the lodges of Mr. Robinson, a trader, who usually stations himself here to traffic with the Indians and white trappers. His skin lodge was his warehouse; and buffalo robes were spread upon the ground and counter, on which he displayed butcher knives, hatchets, powder, lead, fish-hooks, and whiskey. In exchange for these articles he receives beaver skins from the trappers, money from travelers, and horses from the Indians. And, indeed, when all the independent trappers are driven, by approaching winter, into this delightful retreat, and the whole Snake village, two or three thousand strong, impelled by the same necessity, pitch their lodges around the Fort, and the dances and merry makings of a long winter are thoroughly commenced, there is no want of customers.[16]

Five days after the arrival of Farnham, an east-bound party, returning from Fort Hall, of present Idaho, reached Brown's Hole. Among the new arrivals was F. A. Wislizenus, a German doctor from St. Louis. In his book, written originally in German and giving an account of his journey, Dr. Wislizenus said:

> On August 17, we reached Fort Crockett. It is situated close by the Green River, on its left bank. The river valley here is broad, and has good pasturage and sufficient wood. The fort itself is the worst thing of the kind that we have seen on our journey. It is a low one-story building constructed of wood and clay, with three connecting wings, and no enclosure. Instead of cows the fort had only some goats. In short, the whole establishment appeared somewhat poverty stricken, for which reason it is known to the trappers by the name of Fort Misery. The fort belongs to three Americans: Thompson, Craig, and Sinclair. The latter was at the fort, and received us very kindly but regretted his inability to offer us any supplies.[17]

The excellent journal of E. Willard Smith gives valuable observations on Fort Davy Crockett and its owners. Smith came to the Rockies in the summer of 1839 with the Vasquez

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[16] T. J. Farnham, "Travels in the Great Western Prairies" in R. G. Thwaites, Early Western Travels, XXVIII, pp. 353-354.

[17] F. A. Wislizenus, A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1839, St. Louis 1912, p. 120.

and Sublette Company. At Fort Vasquez on the South Platte, near the present site of Platteville, he joined a company that was heading for Fort Davy Crockett. Under date of September 16, Smith recorded: "Today we left our encampment, and started to cross the mountains. Our party consisted of eight men, two squaws, and three children. One of the squaws belonged to Mr. Thompson, the other to Mr. Craig. They were partners and have a trading post at Brown's Hole, a valley on the west side of the mountain".[18]

On October 1, they reached Brown's Hole, where Smith remained until mid-winter. Sinclair had been at the fort during the absence of his two partners.

Craig's partner, Philip F. Thompson, according to his sworn statement, Affidavit of Settlers on Unsurveyed Lands," National Archives, was born in Williamson County, Tennessee, in 1811. In early life he went to the Rocky Mountains and in 1842 came to Oregon. Of Thompson's youth and his early years in the mountains, we have no record. He was at Brown's Hole in the summer of 1837 according to Kit Carson and Doc Newell, and from there went on a trading expedition to the Navajo Indians. The mules, he and Sinclair procured in this venture, Thompson disposed of at Fort Vasquez on the South Platte. The goods received for the mules he brought back to Fort Davy Crockett to trade with the Indians.

Thompson went down the Arkansas River and to the Missouri frontier for supplies in the spring of 1839. He returned with his goods in the supply cavern of Sublette and Vasquez, leaving Independence, Missouri, on August 6, 1839, and reaching Fort Vasquez September 13.

From South Platte Post Thompson and his partner Craig, with their Indian wives and children, crossed the mountains to their Fort in Brown's Hole.

Of Sinclair, third partner in the ownership of Fort Davy Crockett, little is known. Of his hospitality Mr. Franham writes in 1839: "I enjoyed the lovely scene at Fort Davy Crockett till near midnight in company with Mr. Sinclair; and

[18] L. R. Hafen (Ed.), "With Fur Traders in Colorado, 1839-40: the Journal of E. Willard Smith", in the *Colorado Magazine*, XXVII (1950), p. 112.

when at last its excitements and the thrilling pleasure of being relieved from the prospect of death by hunger allowed me to slumber, that gentleman conducted me to his own room and bed, and bade me occupy both while I should remain with him"[19]

According to H. H. Bancroft, Prouett Sinclair went to California in 1843.[20] In December, 1851 the California State Library reported that Prouett Sinclair, who had gone to the Rockies from Arkansas in 1830, settled at Cowalitos, in Santa Cruz County, California, in 1843 and was an active business man there until 1882. The Santa Cruz County Great Register of 1888 lists him as 77 years old and born in Tennessee.[21] This was no doubt the partner, since his brother Alexander was killed at the battle of Pierce's Hole in 1832.

Edwin L. Sabin in *Kit Carson Days* has the following reference to Fort Davy Crockett and its owners:

> Myeth's Fort Hall had been sold, the summer of 1837 to the British. Under the new proprietors it engaged some of the American Trappers, but Fort Davy Crockett, in Brown's Hole, Colorado, on an elbow of the Green courteously managed by the mountain men, William Craig, Philip Thompson, and Sinclair, was the fashionable American gathering place. Thither, after the rendezvous of this summer, journeyed Kit Carson and seven others. Thompson and Sinclair were organizing a trading trip into the Navajo country of present New Mexico, and Carson joined them. This was a trip not after furs, but after horses and mules, and the Navajo merchandise of ropes and blankets. The latter article especially was valued, and it is valued today. Substantial, warm, waterproof, of pleasant pattern, the Navajo blanket early appealed to the Mexican and traveler over the Santa Fe Trail, was made popular by the American soldiers of the days of 1846, and has maintained itself as a Navajo asset ever since.
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> Out of the Navajo Country, with its peach orchards and ranging flocks, the traders proceeded to Bent's Fort on the Arkansas, where the spoils, principally mules, were sold for the Missouri Market. This winter of 1837-1838 Kit Carson spent in Brown's Hole as hunter for Fort Davy Crockett.[22]

Since Joe Meek and Doc (Robert) Newell were intimates of

[19] Farnham's "Travels", op. cit., p. 358.
[20] H. H. Bancroft, History of California, IV, p. 690; V, p. 709.
[21] T. S. Hudson, (Ed.) Colorado Magazine, XXIX, January 1952, p. 24.
[22] Edwin L. Sabin, Kit Carson Days, A. C. McClurg and Company, Chicago, 1914, pp. 191, 192.

William Craig, we are here reporting a reference from DeVoto's book, *Across the Wide Missouri:*

> Joe was on his way to Fort Davy Crockett and his wife and his partner Newell. He had a shoulder of antelope and in the mountain code offered them breakfast. They had eaten, however, and what they wanted was instruction—the type held true at this meeting. Joe said there was a village of Nez Perces only a day's ride beyond Fort Hall. He himself was going to winter with them when he could get his wife. (A Nez Perce whom he called Virginia; she was to bear him eight children.) He advised the greenhorns to join the village, too, and travel with it to the Nez Perce Country where there was a mission, Spalding's Lapwai. The lava and the peaks, the rivers and the gulches, the sagebrush and the thirst—the country between Bear River and Trail's End was in Joe's mind and he thought, gently, that they would need the Nez Perces.
>
> Farnham thought him much like an Indian: 'The same wild, unsettled, watchful expression of the eye, the same unnatural gesticulation in conversation, the same unwillingness to use words when a sign, a contortion of the face or body, or movement of the hand will manifest thought: in standing, walking, reading, in all but complexion he was an Indian'. He cursed the American Fur Company for them. It had used his skill, risked his life, paid him little, and now cast him off. Every trapper whom Farnham had met—a good many—had said the same. And he looked poor. It was starving times for Joe Meek. He had so sparse and worn an outfit that the wind, which can be cold of an August morning in Bear River Valley, made him shake like an aspen leaf.
>
> Let them watch out for Blackfeet, Joe said. There were some near Soda Springs, which they would presently reach. Farther along they would find Joe's White horse. It had given out and he had had to cache its pack.
>
> Joe Meek, the bear killer, a Carson man, a Bridger man, a Rocky Mountain Fur Company Man—Joe Meek, free trapper, raised his hand and rode off toward Fort Davy Crockett. And the three greenhorns, authentic settlers, and their Snake guide took the trail again, toward the Columbia.[33]

The ultimate fate of the fort is unknown. The wooden structure may have been destroyed by fire, for evidence of the building disappeared. In fact, ranchmen who later settled in Brown's Hole swore that no such post as Fort Davy Crockett ever existed in the valley. Brown's Hole was again the setting

[33] Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri*, pp. 383, 384.

for lively activity a few decades later, when cattle rustlers made it a notorious hideout.

The year 1840, which saw the last fur trade rendezvous of the mountains, apparently witnessed also the abandonment of Fort Davy Crockett. The partnership of Thompson, Craig, and Sinclair broke up. Craig treked to Oregon in the summer of 1840. Thompson followed him two years later. Sinclair is reported to have settled in California in 1843.

Andrew Sublette led a company of health seekers out over the Oregon Trail and to Green River in the summer of 1844. They left Independence on May 12,[24] and in August turned down Green River to Brown's Hole. No data have been found as to whether or not they reached their destination and how they fared. But Andrew Sublette was back on the South Platte and Arkansas Rivers next spring.

John C. Fremont upon returning from the Pacific Coast on his second exploring expedition reached Brown's Hole on June 7, 1844. "This sheltered valley", he wrote, "was formerly a favorite wintering ground for the trappers." Carson, who accompanied Fremont, had spent much time at Fort Davy Crockett and must have told his chief something of the Fort's history. But nothing of this is recorded in Fremont's official report. The pathfinder merely recorded that his encampment was opposite to the remains of an old fort on the left bank of the river.[25]

Life in Idaho Territory

It is understandable that many of the Mountain Men would give up the life of trapper and seek to settle in the desirable areas that they had learned to know. There was no longer, after 1840, so great a demand for beaver skins as in the decade just closed. Also, it was becoming increasingly more difficult to find spots, in the mountains fastnesses, where beaver could be found in quantity as in former years. With one accord they agreed that it was essential to seek the settlements. Since many of these men had friendly relations with the Nez Perce Indians

[24] Letters of Andrew Sublette to his brother, William, written May 13, 1844 and March 6 and 8, 1845.

[25] J. C. Fremont, "Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, etc.", (Washington, 1845), 39, 573-81.

and had wives from that tribe, and were favorably impressed with the country of the Nez Perce Indians, they quite naturally headed for that country. And in as much as there was not yet a boundary settlement in the disputed Oregon country, between Great Britain and the United States, it is not unlikely that some of these men wanted to help perfect the claim of the United States to that territory. I quote from H. H. Bancroft:

> As it was now absolutely necessary to seek the settlements in order to live, seven of them determined to go to Oregon with their Indian wives and children, about their only worldly possessions, and begin life anew. Their names were Robert Newell, C. M. Walker, J. L. Meek, William Craig, Caleb Wilkins, William M. Doty, and John Larison. Newell, Meek and Wilkins decided to make for the Columbia River. . . .
>
> Craig remained in the upper country and settled at Lapwai, while Meek and Newell proceeded to the Dalles on horseback, leaving their wagons to be brought on at the earliest opportunity.[26]

It was natural that William Craig would settle near Lapwai, Idaho. He was married to Isabel, daughter of Chief James, who was chief of the Nez Perce Indians in the Lapwai Valley. This made it possible for him to learn the Nez Perce language and to understand the customs, attitudes, and beliefs of the tribe. Spalding, the missionary, located along the Clearwater River, near Lapwai, in 1836. Many of the Nez Perce tribe attended his mission school, and in other ways came under his influence. With the coming of Spalding, the influence of Chief James over his people lost strength. This is, no doubt, the chief cause for an enmity between Chief James and Spalding. William Craig and Missionary Spalding did not get along well as neighbors. Craig's kinship with Chief James and his years "Roughing It" as a Mountain Man may have been the leading factors that promoted their mutual dislike for each other; but more about this later. Craig's usefulness in dealing with the Indians is shown in the following quotations from the book *War Chief Joseph* by Howard and McGrath. Incidentally, Chief Joseph as a boy, attended Spalding's school. His father, Chief Joseph had been baptized by Spalding.

> Soon after the Whitman Massacre, November 29, 1847, regular troops and several companies of volunteers were sent to cam-

[26] H. H. Bancroft, Vol. XXIX, *History of Oregon*, Vol. I, 1834-1848, pp. 241, 242.

paign against the Cayuses in revenge for the murder of the whites; when guilty members of the Cayuse tribe fled into the hills, some of the volunteers suspected the Nez Perces of abetting their escape and favored an attack upon the latter. For a while it seemed that the innocent Nez Perces would be involved in the trouble. With the arrival of Colonel Gilliam and his regulars at Waiilatpu, a council was arranged through the efforts of William Craig, who acted in behalf of the Nez Perces. This meeting was attended by 250 warriers [sic] led by Tu-eka-kas (Joseph), who approached the council under the American flag and carried a New Testament in his hand as proof of his good faith toward the Americans.

General Palmer, Indian Agent for Oregon, was favorably impressed by the attitude of the Nez Perces, and told them to return to their homes for the spring planting, and to continue their peaceful relations with the whites. . . .[27]

Concerning Governor Stevens' Council Meeting of 1855:

Next to arrive, after several days' delay, were the Cayuses; then came the Walla Wallas, the Umatillas, and the Yakimas. All tribes but the Palouses were represented. Five Thousand Indians and a mere handful of white officials, attended by a military escort of 47 dragoons under Lieutenant Archibold Gracie, were present at the council. It was probably the greatest peace gathering of Indians ever held in the west. Besides Governor Stevens there were present, his thirteen-year-old son, Hazard; General Joel Palmer; Secretaries James Doty and William C. McKay; Agents R. R. Thompson, R. B. Metcalfe, R. H. Crosby, N. Olney, and R. H. Lansdale; Packmaster C. P. Higgins, the army escort; and interpreters William Craig, N. Raymond, Mat Dampher, and John Flette.[28]

The difficulties between Chief James and Missionary Spalding and the possible influence on Craig are well presented by Francis Haines in his book, *The Nez Perces:*

Chief James and Henry Spalding did not get along too well. Spalding had taken over the local medicine practice depriving James of revenue. Spalding told the Indians that James and the other medicine men got their power from the devil and all their patients were in danger of eternal damnation. He also refused to pay James any rent for the land used by the mission. . . . James had an additional grievance. As Chief of Lapwai, he did not approve of the influx of Indians from other villages. The old tribal custom had explicitly reserved a village site for members of the local band. Now there were

[27] Howard and McGrath, *War Chief Joseph*, the Clayton Printers, Ind., 1952, pp. 36, 38.
[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 48.

Indians from many lands living on what he regarded as land belonging to his band and village but they would not acknowledge him as chief, nor would they obey any of his orders.

Joseph and Timothy, the first two converts, probably irked James most. They ranked highest of all the tribe in the eyes of the Spaldings, and had personal prestige in their own right, each being a village chief. Joseph was one of the important fighting men of the tribe, sometimes leading a war party of several hundred men. Their continued presence at Lapwai considerably reduced the influence of the local chief, who did not see how he could regain his prestige until he had shown that he had power over the Spaldings. It is apparent then that Craig did not cause the trouble at the mission. He merely entered the discussion after it had been going on for some time.[29]

Excerpts from Duery's *Life of Henry Harmon Spalding* throw further light on the difficulties between Spalding and Craig:

When William Craig arrived to live in the valley, things changed. . . . As soon as he arrived, Craig began criticizing Spalding. On December 1, 1840, Spalding wrote in his diary: 'Old James and others say they have been stopped from going after timber by Cragge who tells them I am making dogs and slaves of them. I ought to pay them for going after timber.'

Craig claimed that if Spalding were a sincere missionary he would feed and clothe the people for nothing. . . . Craig found a powerful ally and sympathetic listener in James, who had reasons of his own for opposing Spalding. . . . Craig persuaded some of the Indians to destroy Spalding's mill dam. . . . Spalding practiced the gospel of the second mile, and sawed a number of logs for Craig in order to help him build a house. For a time Craig worked for Spalding, and outwardly at least they remained peaceful, but Craig's influence was always with the 'Heathen' party. At various subsequent times he caused Spalding great concern.[30]

At the time of the Whitman Massacre, Craig gave protection to Mrs. Spalding by inviting her to come to his home:

On Monday, Mrs. Spalding and the others began to get ready to move to Craig's home when suddenly a party of Nez Perces rode up, headed by a Nez Perce who had taken part in the Whitman massacre. . . . They were keenly disappointed to find Mrs. Spalding forewarned, and that Craig was present with a number of Indians friendly to him. The murderous band saw at

[29] Francis Haines, The Nez Perces, University of Oklahoma Press, pp. 83, 84.
[30] Clifford M. Drury, Henry Harmon Spalding, The Caxton Printers, Ltd., Caldwell, Idaho, 1936, pp. 361, 362, 363.

> once that if they tried to harm Mrs. Spalding, it would mean a fight among the Nez Perces. The friendly Indians surrounded the small band of white people and putting the women and children in a wagon that Spalding owned, took them off to the Craig home. . . . The small band of captives in the Craig home, for that is what they had become, were discussing what should be done. Craig felt safe for he had married into the Nez Perce tribe, and the Indians about him promised to protect him.[31]

In 1818 an agreement was reached between Great Britain and the United States that there should be a ten-year period of joint occupancy. Even after the ten-year period had expired no boundary, mutually satisfactory, could be determined upon. England declined any settlement that did not give her the north bank of the Columbia River. Until 1834 the only Americans in the Oregon Territory had been hunters, trappers, and fur traders. The coming of the missionaries, with a few permanent settlers began to change things. In 1835 Marcus Whitman set up a mission at the junction of the Snake and Columbia Rivers. By 1842 there were approximately 500 Americans permanently located in the territory. In 1843 the settlers formed a government of their own and asked Congress to make Oregon a territory.

The constitution of the government formed by the settlers in 1843 had this important provision relative to land claims:

> The claimant should designate the boundaries of his claim, and have the same recorded in the office of the territorial recorder, in a book kept for that purpose, within twenty days from the time of making his claim; unless he should be already in possession of a claim, when he should be allowed a year for recording a description of his land. It was also required that improvements should be made, by building or enclosing, within six months, and that the claimant should reside on his land within a year after recording. No individual was allowed a claim of more than one square mile, or 640 acres in a square or oblong farm according to natural surroundings, or to hold more than one claim at one time.[32]

As stated before, Craig, with some fellow trappers, returned to the Oregon Territory in 1840 and settled in the Lapwai Valley area presided over by Chief James, the father of his wife Isabel. That Craig follows out the provisions of the territorial regulations relative to land claims is indicated in his signed

[31] Ibid.
[32] Bancroft, History of Oregon, p. 311.

Rec'd June 6th 1865

Territory of Washington

Notification

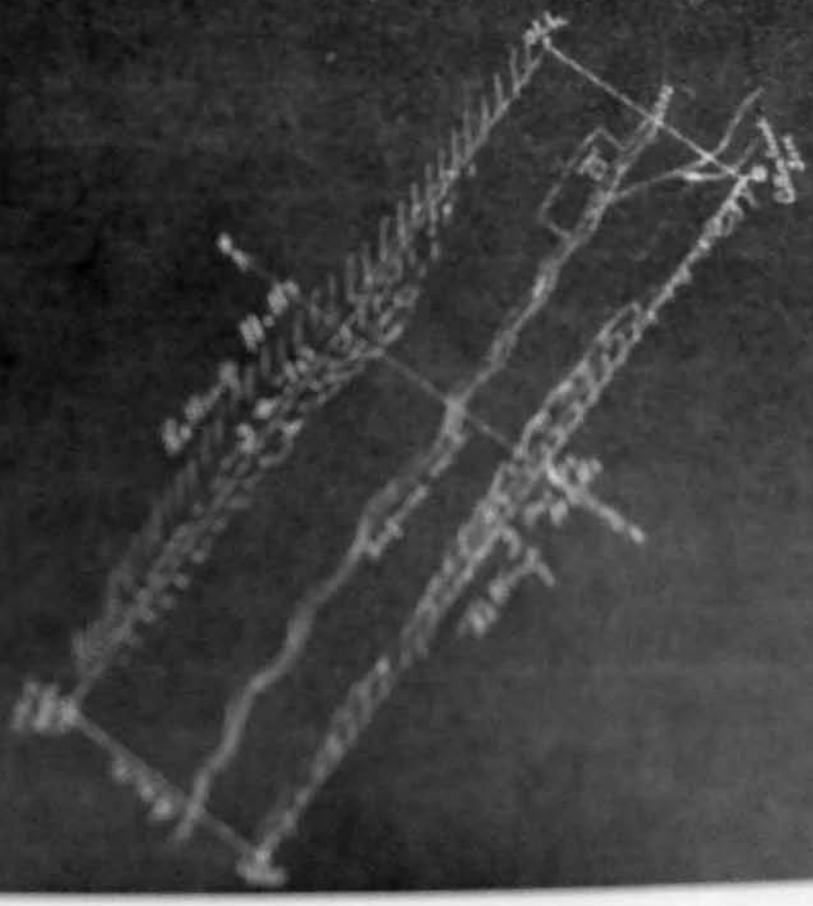
of the Register and Receiver of Washington Territory, of settlement on public lands, not yet surveyed

Pursuant to the Act of Congress, approved the 11th day of February 1865, entitled "An Act to amend An Act entitled 'An Act to create the office of Surveyor General of the Public Lands in Oregon, and to provide for the survey and make donations to settlers of the said Public Lands, and the Acts amendatory thereof."

I William Craig of Walla Walla County in the Territory of Washington, hereby give notice of my claim to a Donation of 640 acres of Land particularly bounded and described as follows.

Beginning at a Stake 30 yards North of Sapiene creek. Thence West two miles to a pile of Rocks, thence South half a mile to a Stake, thence East two miles to a Cotton wood tree, thence North half a mile to the place of beginning.

William Craig



affidavit of June 4, 1855 (See facsimile of Affidavit, National Archives, Washington, D. C.) where he says in part, "that he has personally resided upon and cultivated that part of the Public Land in the Territory aforesaid, and particularly described in the answered notification (see facsimile of Notification, National Archives, Washington, D. C.) to the Register and Receiver of said Territory, continuously from the 15th, September, A. D., 1846 to the 4th day of June A. D., 1855".

Of course, by June 4, 1855, the boundaries of Oregon, as an organized territory by act of Congress (August 11, 1848), had been fixed and the part, north of the Columbia River and east of the Snake River, was now in Washington Territory. Thus, The Lapwai Valley, which was an area east of the Snake River, was in Washington Territory as the "Notification" indicates.

Governor Stevens, in his capacity as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, after many days of deliberation in council, finally secured Indian approval of the land to be set aside as Nez Perce Reservation. This treaty was signed June 11, 1855. William Craig's claim was within the reservation area. The following excerpt indicates the high regard the Nez Perce Indians had for him:

> William Craig, at the special request of the Nez Perces, was protected in his holdings near Lapwai by a special clause in the treaty. His ability to retain the confidence of the tribe and of the various government officials would indicate that he was a more honest man than Spalding had believed. He was a useful man too, acting as interpreter and letter writer for the Indians on many occasions.[33]

In the Indian wars of 1856 and later Colonel Craig served on the staff of Governor Stevens, heading a company of Nez Perce Indians which he had recruited. He was made a Lieutenant Colonel by the governor.

Colonel Craig was interpreter and witness to several Indian treaties negotiated by Governor Stevens. Attention was already called to the treaty with the Nez Perces at the Walla Walla Council, June 11, 1855. There was also the treaty with the Flatheads at Hell Gate, near what is now Missoula, Montana, July 16, 1855 and the treaty with the Blackfoot Indians at the Blackfoot Council, October 7, 1855, on the Missouri River

[33] Hamm, The Nez Perces, p. 126

below the mouth of the Judith in what was then the Territory of Nebraska, now the State of Montana.

As Indian Agent at Lapwai he made a report to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the year 1857. This report is here given:

Walla Walla, W. T.
July 21, 1857

Sir: In compliance with your circular issued at the office of the superintendent of Indian affairs, at Salem, Oregon Territory, March 19, 1857, to the agents and sub-agents of the different tribes of your superintendency, I have the honor to forward to your office the following report, which I think is correct, viz:

I have in my charge the friendly Cayuses, that live in Washington Territory and the Nez Perces tribe. The Nez Perces' country is bounded west by the Palouse River, which lies north of Snake River, and the Tucannon, which lies south of Snake River; on the north by the range of mountains between Clear Water and the Coeur d'Alene; east by the Bitter Root Mountains; on the south they are bounded near the line dividing the two territories.

The face of their country is barren, and very broken; it is well adapted for stock raising.

They number from thirty-one to thirty-five hundred souls. They have quite a large number of horses, and some cattle. They have always professed friendship towards the whites until last summer, when there were about two-thirds of them who got excited, became hostile, and joined the hostile bands; but since that time they have returned to their country and professed to be friendly. They are now working their little gardens, as they were in the habit of doing before the war. I think they have in cultivation some forty or fifty acres; they raise corn, wheat, peas, and potatoes. It is hard to make an estimate of the number of bushels that they raise, as they commence using it before it is ripe.

I think, with the assistance of some farming utensils, they would be able to raise their own subsistence. The last year they were all supplied with subsistence by the government for a short time, and a part of them until this spring, as they had raised nothing during the time of the excitement.

As a tribe, I think them more enterprising and industrious than any of the neighboring tribes. They have no mills, shops, or houses, erected in their country for the use of the Indians. A part of them appear anxious that the treaties should be kept, and a part do not wish it. As soon as they learn that the treaties are not sanctioned they will all be at rest.

They are anxious to have their children schooled, and mills built. I would suggest that an appropriation of twenty-five thousand dollars be made, as that sum, in my opinion, would be sufficient for those things and to maintain peace and friendly relations with the whites.

The friendly Cayuses that have been temporarily in my charge are not doing much in the way of farming this summer. I suppose there are about sixty souls. They do not appear satisfied that the military are in their country. I suppose Agent Dennison will report their condition, as he told me he had them in his report.

I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

William Craig
Indian Sub-Agent, W. T.

Col. J. W. Nesmith
Superintendent of Indian Affairs.[34]

Mention was already made of the fact that he was Postmaster at Walla Walla in 1858 and 1859.

In 1861 the first ferry was established on the Clearwater River at Spalding, Idaho. This ferry was operated by Colonel Craig until 1864 when it was sold to a man named Schenk.

Colonel Craig had a paralytic stroke in 1869 and died in September of that year. Listed as his heirs were: Isabel Craig (wife), Joseph William Craig, Adeline Pinney, Annie Fairfield Woodard, and Martha Robie Vaughan.

On October 27, 1946, Colonel Craig was honored at dedication ceremonies when a memorial stone was unveiled along the North and South Highway, two miles west of Jacques Spur, in the Lapwai Valley. The dedication address was delivered by Dr. Francis Haines who is presently at Oregon College of Education, Monmouth, Oregon. The following descendants of William Craig were present at the unveiling: Mrs. Mamie Johann, Culdesac, granddaughter; George Pinney, great grandson; Fitzhugh Pinney, Culdesac, the only surviving grandson; Mrs. Helen Pinney Jones, Portland, great granddaughter; Mrs. Minnie Caldwell, Lewiston, granddaughter; Mary Ellen Phinney, Culdesac, great great granddaughter; Mrs. Ermith Phinney Freeland, Portland, granddaughter of Fitzhugh Phinney; and Archie Phinney, Superintendent of the Indian Agency at Lapwai.

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[34] Senate Documents, First Session, 35th Congress, Vol. 2, 1857-1858. "Report of the Secretary of the Interior", pp. 341, 342.